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ABSTRACT

Issues in the current discussions surrounding educational choice are discussed in this paper, which examines several underlying assumptions through an analysis of selected metaphorical constructs in a selective review of the choice literature. A conclusion is that the rhetorical power of choice is based on imprecise, limited, and ambiguous metaphors for excellence, effectiveness, science, expertise, productivity, selection, and finally, choice itself. The power of choice is derived from its mythological status. Elevating stories through metaphorical transformations to the level of myth obscures reality and diverts attention from the difficult act of true change. Given the realities of practical implementation, choice systems cannot function as the in-use metaphors and their advocates imply. (50 references) (LMI)

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Obscuring Problem Definition: Changing Metaphors, Choice and Educational Policy

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ABSTRACT

Obscuring Problem Definition: Changing Metaphors, Choice, and Educational Policy

This paper focuses on some of the issues in the current discussions surrounding educational choice. It looks at several underlying assumptions through an analysis of selected metaphorical constructs in a selective review of the choice literature. It concludes by stating several potential implications for future educational policymaking.

Metaphoric Symbols

> "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
> "I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least - at least I mean what I say - that's the same thing, you know."
> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter.
> "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see!" (Carroll, 1865)

Historic Uses

Metaphors produce images related to individual realities by acting as cultural communicators of harmony and tranquility, and transmitting ideals firmly rooted in eurocentric traditions (Welker, 1991). It is our contention education, and specifically education choice, has developed its own unique set of these constructs for organizing our epistomological world. Educational metaphors are useful in systematizing meaning on education's structure, role, and functions within society. While we do not assume these constructs are universally and unquestionably institutionalized, we do believe they have become generally accepted based upon repetition. We take a view similar to that developed by Lakhoff and Johnson (1980) that most human thoughts are essentially metaphorical in nature and provide a conceptual schema through which individuals, and therefore, institutions (including education) systematize their existence. As such these metaphors function as foundation organizers for educational beliefs and actions.

Metaphor, like myth, has a long tradition within religious and secular transmission. Not simply linguistic conventions, they exemplify the beliefs, deities, customs, mores, and taboos which have traditionally defined cultural boundedness (Campbell, 1968). Such symbol systems

reinforce and extend underlying assumptions societies require for transmission and perpetuation of their identify from one generation to the next. Altering these powerful representations changes their underlying constructs and ability to achieve order out of otherwise chaotic environmental stimuli.

Miller and Frederick's (1990) analysis of A Nation at Risk found

> ...a basic structural-functionalist view of society with decidedly conservative political economic overtones...those norms that tend to perpetuate the existing social order, and thereby keep the system in balance....(p 79).
>
> ...the story is partially a borrowed one, and unless it can be told in exactly the same way here, the policy implications that flow from it will always be less than perfect. (p 81).

Metaphors in education serve an historical function. They tell a story of the mores, taboos, and cultural transmissions we wish to maintain and institutionalize for future generations of american students. The caveat, however, is that while metaphor has an historically useful purpose, it can also be a subtle tool for generating acceptance and attribution of qualities to constructs which the constructs themselves neither contain nor are capable of producing [For detailed explanations see Hanson, 1984; Miller, 1987; Reddy, 1979; Schon, 1979; and Welker, 1991 on detailed analyses and explanation of the roles of metaphor in theory and practice].

In this particular case we believe the literature on education choice has developed from one of potentialities and possibilities to one of solutions, and we further believe like other stories of "singular solutions" is doomed to disappoint those who would suggest there can be simplistic approaches to solving the complex policy and implementation problems facing american public education.

Modern Use

In reviewing the literature on choice we looked at several collective works by authors whose works are of either national or international prominence. We looked for constructs which once stated, functioned as underlying assumptions upon which subsequent stories were built. In addition we investigated whether some of the proposed alternatives held to the same assumptive metaphors. Initially stimulated by the publication of Chubb and Moe (1990), we were interested in investigating the construct of educational choice and its development into a powerful explanatory frame for the reform of american education. Our analysis uncovered numerous metaphor types. Lakhoff and Johnson categorized these as foundational, orientational, and container metaphors similar to those identified by Miller and Fredericks, and the war metaphors described by Lakhoff and Johnson. However, we focus the present analysis on those we categorized as the generative/conduit metaphor rationales - markets, politics, and excellence [See Reddy, 1979 and Schon, 1979 for specifics on the generative metaphor and its subset, the conduit metaphor]. The final section discusses the potential dangers of a continued use of these assumptive metaphors and concludes by speculating on their relationship and implications for policymakers and research.

Geiger (Politics, 1990-1) points out that choice itself is a powerful symbol of fundamental american values.

> We [Americans] assume that schools, teachers, and students are different, want to be different, and should be different. We therefore build in choice at every opportunity. ...The point is that our cultural and educational heritage has made choice a central value and has put it in a adversarial position to many considerations of organizational efficiency and educational standards. Each step up the school ladder brings greater choice, for it is our hallmark of adulthood and citizenship. (p 70)

The Japanese secondary school system that is so admired by many choice advocates (Walberg, 1986; 1989) is typified by student selection by examination and a hierarchy of schools. Position in this hierarchy is based upon the examination performance and the university placement success rate of each school. "Japanese schools did not become representative of social diversity. Rather, they continued to reflect the stratification and segregation of academic ability. [of the prewar era]" (Ibid, p 73). Choice is an american container for freedom, individualism, and opportunity.

Educational choice advocates have recently tied choice to contain both efficiency and high standards, replacing the earlier opposition of these values with the claim that choice brings about desired efficiency and high standards. It is no wonder the current incarnation of educational choice has captured the imagination of everyone from president to pundit. A choice metaphor containing efficiency, high standards, liberty, individualism, and local autonomy is rhetorically invincible.

Shared Metaphors

In reviewing the literature we found several shared conduit metaphors. One tied an educated citizenry to the functioning of a democratic society and a promotion of a common public welfare. This requires the support of a public educational system which provides each citizen a threshold level of educational competence. This finding is far from startling. It is commonly accepted in the United States that education has become a right rather than a privilege, at least through the twelfth grade. We need not go far for documentation as state constitutions provide for some form of state-level, sponsored public education through grade twelve. While

we continue to argue on the equitability, equality, and efficiency of these systems [see also Hickrod, et al, MacArthur/Spencer Series for specific discussions], the literature shares a foundational metaphor on the social good of provision:

> Ever since the epochal Massachusetts School Law of 1647, the system of free public education has served as a cornerstone of our democratic society. For millions of Americans it has been the principal vehicle for opportunity and upward mobility. Then and now, countless parents made the necessary sacrifices so that their children could get an education and inherit a better life. (Urbanski, in Nathan, 1989, p 225)

or

> There are those who favor education for its own sake and for other non-material reasons - a democracy requires a literate, broadly knowledgeable citizenry. (Brandl, in Nathan, 1989, p 56)

or

> Without good schools none of America's hopes can be fulfilled. The quality of our education will determine the strength of our democracy, the vitality of our economy, and the promise of our ideals. It is through the schools that this nation has chosen to pursue enlightened ends for all its people. And it is here that the battle for the future of America will be won or lost. (Carnegie, 1988, p xi)

and

> Education was my passport out of poverty. I am a first generation American....(Perpich, in Nathan, 1989, p 1)

A second shared conduit metaphor ties the democratic ideal to the economic impact of schooling on the future of the society:

> It is therefore essential - especially in a period of long-term decline in education achievement - for government at all levels to affirm its responsibility for nurturing the Nation's intellectual capital. (National Commission, p 17)

> Americans like to think of this nation as generating the great ideas and material benefits for all mankind. (National Commission, p 18)

> ...Finally, the quality and efficiency of education could approach the levels achieved by other nations through parental choice. This would help America to become competitive once again in the world market. (Coons and Sugarman, 1991, p 56)

> ...There's a tremendous amount of frustration with the school system as is. The business community in particular is in a panic about the quality of the work force, and there is a growing feeling that the public school system has been given a pretty good shot at turning things around with very little result...(Brandl, 1991, p 60)

> Worldwide developments, particularly in the economic sphere, have produced far-flung consequences for educational policy and politics....Partly because of federal exhortations (Jung and Kirst 1986), and even more because they perceive a linkage between high quality schooling and economic growth and competitiveness, state governors and their legislatures now are involved in educational policy-making in an unprecedented way....(Boyd and Kerchner, 1998, p 1)

These more modern political and economic metaphors are changing the underlying meanings behind the establishment, maintenance, and control of public education in America. They point at a competing and changing value-system which now underlies the movement to reform public schooling.

> ...It's the "quick fix" for the year. Politicians can talk about choice, because if they talk about choice, they don't have to talk about the real problems...My goodness, who could oppose choice - it would be un-American! (Geiger, 1991, p 13) [emphasis in original]

A third conduit metaphor revolves around what Callahan (1962) labeled the "mantle[s] of science and expertness":

> ...extensive criticism began to be directed at the schools, and administrators in particular were accused of not managing the schools efficiently and economically, and as more parallels were drawn between education and business, they both increased their efforts to receive recognition as experts and altered their justification of the need for expertness....(p 209)

> ...a scientific label was put on some very unscientific and dubious methods and practices...as the business-industrial values and procedures spread into the thinking and acting of educators, countless educational decisions were made on economic or on non-educational grounds...Thus they could and did approach education in a bureaucratic, mechanical, organizational way....(pp 246-7)

It appears we are, once again, wrapping reform in the mantles referred to by Callahan, as well as his warnings about expertness ringing true. Glass (1991), Witte(1990, Nov), and Welker (1991) have all reminded us how easy it is to fall into the trap of believing the "stories" told by "experts":

> ...To suggest we know enough from High School and Beyond to overthrow the public school system in the United States and replace it with a choice system is sheer madness. (Witte, p 20)

> ...It is [sic] polemic wrapped in numbers....(Glass, p 26)

> ...Any reform in education needs to be sensitive to the negative implications of the expert metaphor...it reinforces the climate of blame and crisis which now so clouds reasonable public debate. (Welker, p 32)

Glass and Witte referred to the latest standard for choice advocates - Chubb and Moe's **Politics, Markets, and America's Schools** (1990):

> ...In the face of the author's enthusiasm for their findings, even the careful reader - and surely the media and other second-hand consumers of this research - quickly loses sight of the fact that these sweeping recommendations [to substantively change the organization of american public schools] are based on statistical results in which the model accounts for only 5% of the variance in the dependent variable of student achievement. We repeat: The multiple R in these analyses is less than .25...(Glass, p 26)

Glass further points out that while research data have finally achieve "expert" status with policymakers and the public, they are

> ...a mark of its undeniable limitations that the findings of educational research still have about them as much of the character of political rhetoric as they have the character of scientific discovery. (p 27)

Were Callahan writing today he would probably ask if we have learned little from our past experiences with either science or expertness. Our response is that neither data nor expertness,

so defined, are sufficient assumptive metaphors on which to dismantle the american educational system. We are not the first to believe that the purpose of education is not in service of the economy. In 1938 the Educational Policy Commission, led by the National Educational Association, issued a report entitled The Purposes of Education in American Society. It stated education "...was not to serve economic ends alone...it was also to preserve the culture and nurture such fundamental values as self-discipline, sacrifice, and consensus." (Campbell, Fleming, Jackson, Newell, and Bennion, 1987, pp 10-11).

In a stinging critique of social science's use of empiricism Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) spared little in describing how the use of facts manipulate, establish, and justify expertise. While we are not so bold as to take on all of social science, we believe his criticisms provide a useful updated lens through which to view the debate over choice:

> ...The natural scientific concepts of observation and experiment were intended to enlarge the distance between seems and is. The lenses of the telescope and the microscope are given priority over the lenses of the eye....(p 77)
>
> ...Their characteristic lament is: if only government could learn to be scientific! And the long-term response...is to claim that it has indeed become scientific in just the sense that the reformers required...Civil servants and managers alike justify themselves and their claims to authority, power, and money by invoking their own competence as scientific managers of social change...But in every case the rise of...expertise would have to be the same central theme, and such expertise, as we have already seen, has two sides to it: there is the aspiration to value neutrality and the claim to manipulative power....(pp 82-83)

The danger in accepting the expert metaphor is that it assumes (and serves as a container for another metaphor) not only is something broken, but that it can be fixed. It also assumes the requisite knowledge and skill to accomplish the fix are contained in the specialized "experts" which "...make[s] sense out of the confusing patterns of existence, superstition, and

mystery...[but] allows a new level of obscurity to enter affairs which extends far beyond the blind faith we find ourselves extending to experts....(Welker, p 23-4). The power of choice is now undeniable. Just recently President Bush and Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander publicly endorsed it to enhance and improve american education (America, 1991). Former President Reagan supported total choice, and the National Governor's Conference endorses the viability of choice. It is not our intent to oppose choice, only to bring out these underlying meanings and focus the discussion on problem definition, rather than in problem solution, which as Denny (1978) stated is the more critical event.

Next we look at what we describe as the rationale metaphors: markets, politics, and excellence and their use within educational choice.

The Rationale Metaphors

> Rationale: n. 1. the fundamental reason or reasons serving to account for something. 2. a statement of reasons. 3. a reasoned exposition of principles. [1650-60; <L: neut. of rationalis RATIONAL] - Syn. 1. logic, basis, grounds. (Random House Dictionary, 2nd ed, unabridged, 1983)

Politics, Markets, and Excellence

The use of metaphor acts as a rhetorical sleight of hand in which the metaphor itself is used to imply implicit understandings that everyone agrees on meaning. As long as there are no examinations of the similarity of referents among discussants, agreement may be exaggerated to an astounding degree. Choice advocates and other excellence oriented educational critics employ an economic-market metaphor with little examination of the varying meanings its components

possess in different contexts or among different constituents (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Levin, 1990; National Commission, 1983; Tomlinson and Walberg, 1986; Walberg, 1989). This metaphor implies a common understanding and shared meaning of producer, product, and consumer acceptable and viable to all the parties concerned with education. Sometimes the equivalence of education with other market forms of production is dramatically made explicit through the use of Callahan's science and expertise, as exemplified in the following passage:

> Studies of consultant-induced work changes also reveal that moderate to large gains in productivity can be expected in newly-industrializing and modern countries. As Liebenstein (1976) points out, management consultants can repay companies as much as twenty times their fees. Kilby's (1962) analysis of international consulting missions, for example, showed that labor productivity can be increased dramatically. The missions were able to induce productivity gains of 500 per cent in textile mills in India, 200 per cent in Burmese manufacturing assembly, and 45 and 91 per cent in diamond cutting and orange picking in Israel. Kilby, however, reports that when members of these missions returned to firms they had earlier improved, they often found reversion to previous methods. Leibeinstein (1976) offers an economic theory of 'X-efficiency' to explain such to explain such sub-optimal performance. First, tight calculated decision-making, especially of one's own time use, to achieve maximum performance is disliked outside the 'circles of economists, accountants, and engineers.' (p 63) Second, other components of rationality such as objective assessment of reality, independence of mind, prolonged reflection, deferral of short term gratification, and learning from experience are costly and rare. Third, maintaining old ways avoids the cost of 'rate-busting' search and selection of new ways, breaking old social relations, and forming new ones. **Can schools be any different?** (Walberg, 1989 p 82) [Emphasis added].

Productivity and expertness within this metaphor tie a definition of excellence directly to high test scores. Tomlinson and Walberg (1986) address this in their collection: **Academic Work and Educational Excellence: Raising Student Productivity.** Walberg (1986; 1989) defines education as a declining industry and discusses the decline in terms of the products of american education - students. While he labels students as products he analyses test scores. He

compares Japanese and American accomplishments and costs in terms of average scores on, say a test of mathematics. Chubb and Moe (1990) engage in a similar metaphorical dialectic through an extensive analysis of High School and Beyond (HSB) test data to equate educational productivity and efficiency. The 1983 **A Nation at Risk** report was primarily concerned with declining american student test scores. Excellence appears now primarily defined as a matter of american students out-scoring international students on a set of standard measures. Indeed, the most recent Governor's conference set just such a goal and labeled it as excellence (America, 1991).

The emphasis on Japanese performance in the choice literature is also somewhat paradoxical (Levin, 1990). The Japanese system solves our educational problems if high test scores are the sole definer of excellence (Rohlen, 1983). Teach the test diligently to all students and make students work very hard for a long time. Then test them often and emphasize the importance of tests and testing. Do not waste time on information transfer or ideas not likely to be tested. At some point in the educational process (the Japanese system does this at the ninth grade) segregate the poor testers so the system can concentrate on the high scorers. Japanese average scores seem to define excellence for many of the current observers. It is one of our propositions that choice seems a flawed and value-laden metaphor for matching the performance of a narrowly focussed system. It also overlooks a potential need to revise the nature of student dependency (vis-a-vis students' will to achieve) under the current client-service model (Welker, 1991).

If choice is to accomplish excellence (defined primarily by performance on tests) consumers must respond to test-related attributes of the product when selecting a producer. Market advocates appear to assume the necessary products of schools are students who produce high test scores which indicate readiness for tertiary education. Outcomes are subsequently defined in terms of examinations associated with entrance to tertiary education (SAT, ACT), content examinations related to academic background for tertiary education (HSB outcome data), or actual attendance or graduation rates from tertiary institutions. [See for example: Coleman and Hofer, 1987. We seriously question whether these concerns of market advocates or other excellence critics are shared universally by end product consumers of the educational chain. Some high school students and their parents share these values and expectations, and are primarily focussed on tertiary education, but we hold that they are individuals who already share the socioeconomic traits of the market and excellence advocates.

We also suspect the majority of family units that include school-age children and adolescents have a different range of outcomes in mind as compared to those espoused by market and excellence advocates. We believe that while most parents accept graduation and employment as acceptable outcome states, and that tertiary education is an acceptable temporary substitute for employment, we contend variations in the definition of an acceptable product or adequate service metaphor (as a function of consumer SES) seriously disrupts the facile analogy (see especially Chubb and Moe, 1990) drawn between education and this product and service delivery system. Educational quality, supposedly enhanced by market pressures, is clearly intended by market proponents to imply preparation for tertiary education (Brandl, 1989; Chubb and Moe, 1990;

Walberg, 1989). If tertiary education is not a central expectation of a substantial proportion of the educational consumer market, how then can market pressures enhance educational quality?

The metaphor becomes more strained when one includes as a consumer class the eventual employers of students. Major corporations are concerned about the quality of the work force. However, tertiary education, educational quality, or excellence are not their primary concern (Stone, 1991; Szabo, 1991). Employees are expected to be able to read, perform fundamental arithmetic calculations, follow directions, and come to work regularly and on time. There are occasional references made to the technical level of the future laborforce, but serious efforts at projecting the workforce needs for the near future indicates a need for large increases in the numbers of custodians, and lower level clerks, across th next several decades (Grubb, 1987). Major employers appear to have no greater need for college graduates than is now met, despite the warnings of some excellence critics (Kirst, 1990). Companies' complaints center largely around the cost of training employees in basic skills. Thus, neither parents nor employers appear to hold the same assumptions of acceptable education end products or services assumed by some choice advocates. This is further confounded by the quite different assumptive meanings students and parents hold compared to the potential employers. Families expect school to provide a set of services including content education. Employers expect schools to provide a viable end-product, individuals prepared for work or further training. Those applying market analogies to education simply ignore these ambiguities as inapplicable in their analyses.

The market forces invoiced by Chubb and Moe (1990) operate in a peculiarly constrained market of the current private sector. The characteristics they associate with effective private

schools (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Coleman and Hofer, 1987) are dependent on environments which subsume and redefine the current public educational system. Public education currently acts as a force promoting private education as an alternative to the public system. At the same time public education relieves private education from the problems associated with students either too troublesome, or costly, for the private sector to accommodate (Levin, 1990). Market advocates clearly assume the availability of services provided by the public sector will continue uninterrupted under a choice system:

> State officials and agencies would remain pivotal to the success of public education and to its ongoing operation. They would provide funding, approve applications for new schools, orchestrate and oversee the choice process, elicit full information about schools, provide transportation to students, monitor schools for adherence to the law, and (if they want) design and administer test of student performance. School districts, meantime, would continue as local taxing jurisdictions, and they would have the option of continuing to operate their own system of schools. (Chubb and Moe, p 255-6)

They also appear to assume these services are intended to place minimal constraints on schools of choice.

> Schools [of choice] will make their own admissions decision, subject only to nondiscrimination requirements....They must be free to admit as many or as few students as they want, based on whatever criteria they think relevant - intelligence, interest, motivation, behavior, special needs - and they must be free to exercise their own, informal judgements about individual applicants. (Chubb and Moe, p 221-2)

The use of the market metaphor seems to also imply an open competition among a freely choosing consumer populations. The details of this particular market proposal appear to us to define some, but certainly nowhere close to all the characteristics of an open market.

Chubb and Moe (1990) also use politics as a form of metaphorical boogie man, and attribute the failures of public education to the negative effect of current political governance.

They clearly imply a particular narrow meaning of politics:

> The raison d'etre of democratic control is to impose higher-order values on schools, and thus to limit their autonomy. The schools are not in the business of pleasing parents and students, and they cannot be allowed to set their own agendas. Their agendas are set by politicians, administrators, and the various democratic constituencies that hold the keys to political power. The public system is built to see to it that the schools do what their governors want them to - that they conform to the higher-order values their governors seek to impose. (p 38)

Here democratic politics is equated to power, influence, hierarchical control and miring bureaucracy. The rhetorical power of demands to remove such political influence from schools has a long history with American education [see for example: Callahan, 1962 and Ravitch, 1974].

Chubb and Moe engage, then, in a potentially dangerous attribution and dialectic game by equating the failure of the educational system to the effects of political governance. We have no way of ascertaining if their assumptive meanings for politics, power, and political influence are the same as those advocates of choice who now use their data as a justifying standard.

Power is often defined as that which is legitimately granted by the people to those in government. It grants the rights to decision making in lieu of a popular participatory process to those elected or appointed. Influence is the capability to persuade based on access to information or resources not available to others. Authority is legitimate influence, i.e, political leaders utilize influence based on access to information and resources not available to the general populace and convert it into legitimated authority. That is, authority based on the general acceptance that their information and resources provide a better decision process than if the populace made these decisions minus this information or resources. Until now choice advocates had limited access

to a means for adopting the mantle of science and acquiring expert status. Chubb and Moe help accomplish this feat by a series of complicated statistical manipulations of the HSB data set. It is then striking that when their data analysis, the basis for expert scientific status, is attached they retreat to a statement that their conclusions are more important than their basic analyses [See A Response to our Critics, Chubb and Moe, 1991]. Thus, choice advocates are left with an attribution of authority to a questionable data set whose analysis and interpretation are controversial at best.

It is also then clear the literature on choice we reviewed mixes a number of its metaphors. Power, rule, authority vis-a-vis, politics, is clearly intermixed with economic constructs. Again, the danger is in having no clear definitions of how such constructs as productivity, selectivity, excellence, etc. may be metaphorical representations of substantively distinct epistomological or philosophical assumptions depending on whether used by lay choice advocates, market economists, educational policy analysts, or policymakers. Those favoring an explicit reduction in the political control of schools might well remember the comment of arch-segregationist Senator Theodore Bilbo: "'All this talk about talking the schools out of politics is a huge joke to intelligent people' he said. 'It means nothing except to take the schools out of your politics and put them in my politics.'" (Tyack, 1973, p 284).

Choice as a conduit for school improvement also depends fundamentally on the value of educational quality as a trait. Advocates of choice and a free educational market assume being chosen determines educational quality, or factors strongly correlated with educational quality. This appears a valid assumption for those who already choose private education. However, can

we safely assume all parents will, when provided educational choice, select schools using the same set of criteria that parents of private school students now use? Why should they? Private and public school families differ on a series of dimensions including, among others, socioeconomic status, parent education level, and degree of involvement with the school (Coleman and Hofer, 1987). There seems no a priori reason to assume the criteria for choice, or their underlying meanings, will be the same for these two populations of parents. Levin (1990) notes parents from economically and educationally disadvantaged circumstances will be doubly handicapped in both access to information about schools and in effective use of that information. Choice will be determined by the preferences, values, and sophistication of the selecting population. It is virtually certain some families will select based on the best football team or coach. Others will select the most convenient, or (as in the case of many magnet schools now) the safest, the highest status for the community, or characteristics neither these authors, nor the advocates of free, open markets have thought of yet. (Levin, 1990; Moore and Davenport, 1990).

A free, open educational market places the control of school survival in the hands of those who also bring us the selection of entertainment on the major television networks. Would Adam Smith really be happy? There is absolutely no guarantee that selection criterion will be correlated with educational quality. We suspect more parents will use academic criteria than now select private or parochial education. However, it is probably safe to assume that not all, or even a majority of, families of students now at educational risk will use academic criteria as the basis for selection.

It may be equally naive to assume students will be totally free to select any school, as the choice rhetoric implies. Some of the attraction inherent in the choice metaphor resides in implied individual freedom. The restrictions on individual freedoms will necessarily be required if schools of choice are to be selective - a fact frequently obscured by choice's proponents. Nevertheless, a school selectivity is a prominent selling feature of choice schemes, and is presented as one of the essential characteristics of effective schools' choice supports. The recommendations for a choice system as provided by Chubb and Moe (1990) especially emphasized the importance of a school's setting its own admission standards and retention of its rights to expel or refuse admittance to students.

We are also neither confident, nor convinced, as market enthusiasts are, that market mechanisms will eliminate any schools. We do not really believe unpopular schools will cease to exist. Unpopular schools with lower enrollments will retain all the basic fixed costs associated with current school operations and their continued operation (due in part to passive choice by some families and in part to mandatory compulsory education laws) will result in increased per pupil costs for systems as a whole (Levin, 1990). There are also costs associated with efforts to "survive". College and university admissions offices have long since become sales and marketing units in many higher education institutions. The market pressures a free, open, educational system places on K-12 schools will result in intense efforts and increased costs attached to recruiting. "Other schools that had not been successful in defining a market would find themselves chasing whim, fad, and trend, just as tuition dependent colleges do now."

(Kerchner, 1990, p 274). Consider those responses by colleges and universities experiencing enrollment declines. The only consistent responses are efforts at change. Every reader can think of efforts which were academic and educational disasters. Evolutionary processes are random and opportunistic. A free, open, market system of educational choice will result in changes associated with Madison Avenue-like efforts to increase enrollments. The degree of association between these changes, educational quality, and any cost-benefit ratios are empirical questions we believe too expensive to ask.

Acceptance of a "Darwinian model" for a free, open, educational market rests on two risky assumptions. First, the naive assumption that the popularity of a school is determined by factors correlated with academic achievements. The second is that at-risk students will be accommodated any better by a choice system than they are under the present system - which appears to be in conflict with the limited information now available (Moore and Davenport, 1990). A free, open, educational market/choice system changes both American public and private education. There is no way any current policymaker or analyst can predict, with any degree of confidence, the nature or direction of these changes nor their ultimate individual or cumulative social costs.

SUMMARY

Having looked at these new conduit metaphors, what meanings do they have for education in general, and in particular for the current press to embrace partial public, total public, or total educational choice? We have sketched out our preliminary view on how some of the proposed

choice models may be viewed. We have done this not so much to support or decry either choice or non-choice. Rather, we provide this preliminary synthesis to highlight our assertions that choice systems cannot function as the in-use metaphors and their advocates imply they do, or can, given the realities of practical implementation.

Kerchner and Boyd have proposed alternative choice policy clusters predicated on the assumption that both markets and bureaucracies occasionally fail:

> ...We know that markets sometimes fail to produce some socially desired goal and that compensating for market failure is a substantial topic in the discipline of economics and the practice of public policy. Markets exhibit cycles of boom and bust and have tendencies to seek stability through collusion and monopolistic practices that make them less productive of choices and their products more costly to consumers. Bureaucracies exhibit their own failures. They tend to ossify and to displace client service goals for goals associated with the well-being of employees and managers...(Kerchner and Boyd, 1988, p 99).

However, while their clusters use a mixture of bureaucratic and market components, they emphasize and subscribe to the same assumptive conduit metaphors.

Nathan (1990) subscribes to these conduit metaphors in his list of characteristics of the most effective public school choice plans, including:

* Include a clear statement of goals, and school and student objectives.
* Help parents select programs by providing information and counseling.
* Do not discriminate against students o the basis of past achievement or behavior.
* Do not use "first come, first served" admission procedures.
* Foster the development of distinctive features in most schools in a geographic area, rather than a few schools.
* Involve building-level educators in creating programs.
* Provide transportation within a reasonable area with special attention to low income and non-English speaking families.
* Require that dollars follow students, one school get the money for an individual student.
* Apply procedures that promote desegregation and integration.
* Provide continuing oversight and modification. (p 281).

While Kerchner and Boyd's policy clusters permit public choice and approach the multiple goals listed by Nathan, and recognize the politically realistic needs to provide excellence, equity, and minimal additional public expense, they like Nathan's prescription appears clear and unambiguous. However, when their prescription is invoked choice no longer functions in a system where unfettered natural selection acts to insure survival of the fittest. Each of Kerchner and Boyd's clusters defines a pattern of domestication rather than unfettered natural selection which may or may not support the outcomes intended by the most vigorous reform advocates. Change would certainly follow the adoption of any of these alternatives as the orientation for choice-based school reform. Increased expenditures, at least initially, are certain (Levin, 1990). Beyond these few certainties very little can be guaranteed by this proposed mass restructuring of the educational system to include new dimensions of choice.

The professional and social consequences of an error would seem to force an historically traditional and conservative population, school administrators and teachers, toward the safest possible alternatives (Callahan, 1962). Schools would be developed and programs planned with survival as an ever-present consideration. It is not difficult to imagine a typical solution to the demands of professional self-preservation in this severely restricted environment (provided by regulated public choice) as resembling current public schools much more closely than current private schools.

The attractions of choice are based on assumptions that choice, either in a free, open, market or within a regulated system, contains the advantages found in private and parochial schools. When the total population, rather than current private school clients, select schools it

is unlikely the characteristics now typical among private schools will be maintained without change or modification. When all the restrictions of public education (i.e., federal and state mandates, rules, and regulations, etc) are superimposed on a choice system, maintenance of the desirable features of school of choice is highly improbable.

Conclusions

We have reviewed a limited sub-set of the recent educational choice literature with the power and influence of choice as the initial motivator for our efforts. We believe the rhetorical power of choice is based on imprecise, overlapping, limited, and ambiguous metaphors for excellence, effectiveness, science, expertness, productivity, selection, and finally choice itself. We believe the power of choice is derived from its mythological status. We also believe that telling stories helps us denote who we are and how we have developed as a system of education (Denny, 1978). What we derived from our analysis is that while the surface arguments have taken on new language, the underlying meanings have not. We still talk of politics, closed systems, and liberty. These are neither new, nor bold. The value of metaphor in transmitting these values to a broader public and across generations is valid, but also has its darker side, too. Elevating stories, through metaphorical transformations especially as outlined here, to the level of myth obscures reality and diverts attention from the difficult act of true change. It obscures research in the mantle of numbers. While we do not disparage finding multiple avenues for reform, we resist divesions through polemics of expertise and scientific smoke-and-mirrors toward singular solutions. "In the context of the current reform movement,

metaphors have become more important than ever in styling the tenor of the public conversation and in advancing specific social and political agendas" (Welker, p 20). Like Welker we believe our 20th century tendency toward technological language obscures reality and changes the story being told. It sets the educational community up, once again, to be accused of trendiness. But it appears, at least from this preliminary analysis, it is easier to engage in metaphors than in more productive dialogues.

There are other issues we have only touched upon, and have excluded from this analysis. We refer to the theoretical implication of choice versus implementation realities both from a justice as fairness versus utilitarian position and from a financial perspective. Neither have we analyzed the mixing of the metaphors of schooling versus education;; politics versus economics nor the changed meanings of the system as a service provider versus end-product producer. We have also refrained from entering the debate over where best to intervene - at the levels of input, throughput, or output. We leave these unresolved dilemmas for the research community to investigate and clarify.

Perhaps the current rhetoric is not all that unpredictable in light of our historic penchant for the quickfix referred to by Callahan and Geiger. But we champion Callahan's warning about devolving educational decision making into the trivial and peripheral when faced with overwhelmingly complex systemic problems. We have attempted to explain why choice has become so powerful by, as Denny suggests, improving the discussion on problem definition rather than on problem solutions. Perhaps a resurgence of god-country-apple pie and industrial-mechanical metaphors are all we can reasonably expect given our history.

> ...and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone. (Carroll, 1986).

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